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ABSTRACT

Making repeated use of a traditional tale can offer various kinds of language practice. Many new teachers use a reading passage just once, investing considerable time in the explanation of the vocabulary needed to understand it, and then rush on to something new. Actually, the best potentialities of the material are still to be tapped, through such activities as the following, which "recycle" the familiar Aesop's fable, "The Fox and the Grapes": (1) Cloze exercises; (2) Half-sentences (Each pupil receives a strip of paper bearing half a sentence and finds the classmate who holds the other half.); (3) Smuggled sentences (Into the chalkboard copy of a familiar story the teacher inserts two sentences from another story. The pupils detect and copy out the smuggled sentences.); (4) Scrambled sentences; (5) Strip story; (6) Controlled composition; and (7) Asking and answering (Pupils ask each other questions to test literal and inferential comprehension and to elicit details not given in the story.) Teachers should record the stories on cassettes for students to listen to whenever they have the opportunity. The story ought to be heard so often that it is virtually committed to memory. This is a great help in developing fluency and reading speed. (Author/CFM)

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AESOP AND COMPANY
USING TRADITIONAL TALES IN EFL CLASSES

Language teachers today are frequently told that their responsibility goes beyond developing in students a grasp of linguistic forms and arrangements. Teachers are reminded that social appropriateness should also be taught. For instance, it is not enough to initiate students into the linguistic operations required for constructing questions that begin with Where and How. We have not fully done our job until the students have learned that one question (WHERE ARE YOU GOING?) should not be addressed to a relative stranger, whereas another question (HOW ARE YOU?) is conventionally used by persons without the slightest interest in the listener's health. Since there are cultures in which HOW ARE YOU would be considered more "personal" than WHERE ARE YOU GOING, it is up to the teacher of English to acquaint students with the social contexts appropriate to each.

This emphasis on social context (which is part of what is sometimes called communicative competence, or communicative efficacy) is proper and laudable. I suspect, however, that it has generated some uneasiness among teachers, particularly among teachers who are not native speakers of English, teachers who may themselves have had little first-hand experience with the use of the language for communication in daily life.

The focus upon communicative competence may also be posing problems for those whose students have little expectation of ever needing to communicate in English outside the English class. Understandably, such students often consider "social appropriateness" an expendable luxury. They are doing well, they think, if they can achieve reasonable mastery of the grammar and vocabulary introduced in their basic text.

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Often, of course, even in such classes, the teacher goes beyond the textbook, supplementing its treatment of the featured linguistic items by incorporating into the lesson some sort of teacher-prepared material. In classes I have visited around the world, a favorite type of supplementary material is the anecdote, drawn from some book available to the teacher. Having selected a story brief enough to be dealt with in a single class period, the teacher copies it on the chalkboard, then proceeds to have it read and discussed.

One purpose of my remarks today is to applaud this practice -- the use of stories from books intended for English-speaking people -- a practice which I assume to be perfectly familiar to teachers everywhere. A second purpose is to suggest certain tales to be considered particularly for EFL use. The third, and major, objective is to describe several uses of such stories. Some of the activities to be described seem not to be widely used, though teachers who have tried them have found them worthwhile.

Why stories?

There is no need to discuss at length why stories belong in a language class. Pupils usually enjoy them, and appreciate meeting in story-context the linguistic forms they have been toiling to learn. Moreover, stories copied from books engender a sense of security in teachers who may lack confidence in their own grasp of idiomatic English. Furthermore, a story-centered lesson gives the class a shared experience in the target language. It offers them something to talk about, and it encourages talk. Then, too, aside from such practical considerations, there is something to be said for the use of stories from the standpoint of theory. Those who have made a special study of language acquisition often stress the importance of shifting the focus away from individual, unrelated sentences to larger contexts. In most language classes, too little time is spent on connected discourse, on sentences woven together into paragraphs and larger units. A tale goes beyond the isolated sentence; it shows how English uses connectives and sequence-markers to move from sentence to sentence. For all these reasons, it is fortunate that stories are so often found in EFL classes around the world.

Which stories?

How, then, to decide which tales to choose? Beyond considerations of length, vocabulary load and syntactic complexity, what else is to be taken into account in selecting stories for the language class? Should they deal with contemporary life? Should the characters and settings come out of the students' own culture? Should one choose stories that supply glimpses of life in English-speaking lands?

A case could be made for any and all of these. A balanced diet calls for several kinds of stories, both old and new. But my comments today concern the older tales, which have survived the centuries -- tales generally known by literate adults for whom English is the mother tongue. Shared memories of these play a subtle communication role. Meeting someone who knows these old stories is like finding he is acquainted with one's home town.

Alive in the minds of educated speakers of English are many protagonists of oft-repeated tales. Some are people, like the Pied Piper, the Good Samaritan, King Midas, Pandora, David and Goliath, Mary and Martha, the Boy Who Cried Wolf. Others are animals: the Hare and the Tortoise, the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, the Dog in the Manger, the Goose that Laid the Golden Egg. What all these have in common is their symbolic force, their influence--though often unrecognized -- upon our life and thought.

In the 1940's, Charles S. Fries called attention (in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language) to the part played by traditional tales. Some of the meanings associated with English vocabulary, he said, come out of old stories that a native speaker learns as a child.

Somewhere in the curriculum, learners of English as a Foreign (or Second) Language ought to meet the traditional tales, whether or not the stories have been met before in the learners' own tongue.

But what about the objection sometimes raised: that such stories are "too childish"? In countries where English is begun at the age of eleven -- it is said -- the pupils may be too mature to enjoy tales that English-speaking children hear in the

nursery or in the primary grades. Yet many EFL teachers find such tales can be made appealing to students in all age groups. The crucial question is how the story is used. Strategies that work with younger learners are usually wrong for pupils approaching their teens. Yet even Cinderella or The Three Bears can serve as useful context for language practice among older students when linked with activities that challenge the learners' skill.

Uses for Younger and Older Pupils

Young children may enjoy drawing pictures to illustrate a story, especially if some are permitted to do so at the blackboard. Or they may pantomime the action while the teacher retells the story. Or they may dramatize a story for their classmates, or retell it when cued by the teacher's pictures placed on a display board.

When slightly older and learning to read English, pupils may listen to the teacher's reading of a story while they follow the text with their eyes. Or, while silently reading, they may hear a cassette recording done by the teacher or by some other expert speaker of English. This, on the whole, is usually more valuable to the learner than hearing his classmates stumble through oral reading of the tale. Admittedly there may be problems when children listen while reading silently on their own. Teachers sometimes find that certain children tend not to try to read along themselves if they are able to hear the story being read aloud. On the other hand, some children tend not to listen: they read ahead on their own, ignoring what is being read aloud. One way to keep the pupils' silent reading synchronized with their listening is to interrupt the reading aloud from time to time, calling upon a pupil to finish the sentence by reading from the text. A variation upon this procedure is what Emilio Cortez calls "snap reading." In the June 1975 RELC Journal, he says:

> Snap reading requires that the teacher read orally at normal speed, stop, and snap his fingers, which alerts a student to read the next word. The teacher resumes reading, stops, and snaps his fingers again. A different student reads the next word, and so on. Students are to read their individual words with the proper pro-

> nunciation and intonation so that the natural flow of the teacher's oral reading is not distorted.

Cortez views snap reading as "a supportive intermediary step between the teacher's oral reading and the students' oral reading." He recommends that the "snapped" words be content words (not function words) and that two students be permitted to share the same text, so that if either student loses his place, his companion may be able to put his finger on the word to be read.

Silent reading accompanied by listening may require a little training, but it is excellent practice. It helps the learner associate sounds with spellings, it teaches him which syllables are stressed, it shows him how words are blended, and where speakers of English may pause.

In addition to sessions devoted to listening while reading, there ought to be times when the pupils just listen -- hear the same story over and over again, on a cassette ready for quick insertion into a recorder constantly accessible on the teacher's desk. In most language periods there are many small chinks of wasted time -- time wasted so far as language learning is concerned. No English is being learned while the pupils are entering and taking their seats, while books are being distributed, while homework is being collected, and so on. Such blank spaces could often be filled with the sounds of English. The cassette recording previously used for listening-while-reading might be replayed every day for a week, allowing the students to become thoroughly familiar with the sound of a story previously read and discussed. The point is this: A story ought to be heard so often that it is virtually committed to memory; at least a number of phrases from the tale should take root in the mind.

Leonard Bloomfield was fond of saying, "Language learning is <u>over</u>-learning." Some of his precepts have been misinterpreted and misapplied; and "over-learning" is one of those. But people who have gained practical command of a foreign language often stress the value of over-learning certain useful linguistic

forms. One of the best ways to encourage over-learning is to let pupils hear a familiar story, again and again, often enough to anticipate what the voice will say next. This contributes to fluency in speech; it also increases reading speed and comprehension.

Before going on to mention other uses of traditional tales in the language class, let me try to make explicit something the foregoing remarks have often implied. In one way or another I have recommended recycling, re-introducing a story for various purposes, in various modes.

As I observe the efforts of inexperienced language teachers (trainees in our university courses) I am struck by their lack of thrift. Our new teachers tend to use a bit of material just once, then feel they must rush on to something new. Hence a great deal of time goes into explaining the vocabulary of a story; then, following a perfunctory discussion, only half understood by many members of the class, the teacher seems to feel the subject is closed. Actually, the best potentialities of the material are still to be tapped. A tale that has become familiar to the class can be used as context for language practice in many different ways.

To illustrate, let us take one fable, easy to find in books available to teachers wherever English is taught:

The Fox and the Grapes

While walking through a forest one day, a hungry fox saw some grapes. The grapes were hanging from a vine, high up in a tree.

"How delicious those grapes look!" the fox said to himself. "How I wish I could eat some of them!" he thought.

The fox tried jumping for thebeautiful purple grapes. Getting them was not going to be easy. Although he tried and tried to reach them, he could not do so. At last he gave up trying and walked sadly away.

As he left the tree, he said, "Those grapes are probably sour." He told himself, "I didn't really want them anyway."

Twelve Uses for "The Fox and the Grapes" (or any other tale)

Now to consider some uses of this tale, after the vocabulary has been taught (partly through pictures and demonstrations) and comprehension has been tested, and the point of the fable has been discussed. Assuming that the teacher has read it aloud to the class, and several pupils have repeated some of the phrases and sentences, what more can be done?

First, there is the cloze exercise, done in progressive stages. With the copy still on the chalkboard, the teacher erases one word from each sentence, then reads the story through once more, stopping at each blank for a pupil to suggest what word belongs there. Gradually more words are deleted by the teacher, until the pupils find themselves restoring whole phrases (through a forest, from a vine, in a tree, to himself). This process not only helps the class master prepositions -- always a troublesome task -- it also encourages reading by syntactic units rather than word-by-word.

On another day, the same story may appear on the chalkboard, but this time there are long gaps, where phrases should be. Individual pupils are handed phrase strips -- long strips of heavy paper, boldly imprinted with phrases from the familiar story. Each pupil goes to the blackboard to fit his strip into its appropriate gap, and reads the sentence aloud.

On a third occasion, the story no longer appears on the blackboard, but HALF SENTENCES from it, printed on strips, are distributed among the pupils. At the front of the classroom, each pupil finds a classmate who holds the other half of his sentence. Standing side by side, the two read their completed sentence, and their classmates judge the rightness of the match.

On still another day, the pupils enter the room to find the familiar story on the chalkboard once more, but this time the teacher has inserted into it some "smuggled" sentences, taken from a different story. The pupils are given a limited time for detecting the smuggled sentences, each pupil copying them out to be compared with his classmates' choices. Sometimes a pupil

has "helped" the teacher by preparing the chalkboard copy before his classmates arrived, inserting the smuggled sentences in consultation with the teacher. He then judges the products of his classmates' detective work.

Since pupils enjoy writing on the board, and are seldom privileged to do so, a student may also serve as scribe for the next activity, scrambled sentences. On entering the room, the pupils find the familiar tale again on the board; but this time the sentences within each paragraph are out of their proper order. Each pupil is given the task of rearranging the sentences; or pairs of pupils are made responsible for working together to reorder a single paragraph, while other pairs work on other sections of the story. Either way, the pupils copy the reordered paragraphs on the board for the class to judge. At that time, attention is difected to the clues which led to the sequencing of the sentences (e.g., definite articles vs indefinite ones, pronouns, adverbial signals or transition like As he walked away.)

A traditional tale like The Fox and the Grapes is also well suited to a device called the strip story by Robert E. Gibson. In the TESOL Quarterly of June 1975 he describes it as follows:

> It is an adaptation of the scrambled sentence type of exercise in which each student memorizes one sentence of a story . . . . With each student being the sole source of one piece of information, his sentence, the story is put back together strictly through verbal interaction of the class.

Gibson insists upon one point: the student must memorize his sentence, then destroy the strip on which it is printed (or return the strip to the teacher) before setting out to find the classmates whose sentences follow and precede his own. This requires the student to read his sentence with intense concentration, and it forces the students to intereact orally in English, as each pupil goes around saying his sentence to others.

Although the strip story activity appears to be used by Gibson with a story not previously read by the class, it is also useful in recycling familiar tales. Here is how it would work in a reprise of The Fox and the Grapes:

The teacher has printed on a separate slip of paper each of the sentences from the story. The five sentences from the first half of the story have been labeled "A", the other five "B". The slips are distributed at random to ten students, and attention is drawn to the following instructions, on the blackboard:

1. Notice whether your sentence is marked "A" or "B". The "A" sentences belong in the first half of the story; the "B" sentences belong in the second half.
2. Read your sentence several times, until you can say it without looking at your strip.
3. Return your strip to the teacher.
4. At the front of the room, join others who have memorized sentences from the story.
5. Say your sentence, and listen to their sentences. With them, decide whose sentence should be first, and whose should be next.
6. Standing side by side in proper order, tell the story to the class.

In my experience, and in the reported experience of several other teachers, this exercise has produced miraculous results. It inspires meticulous attention to the surface structure of each sentence, and to the deep structure as well, since the sentences cannot be sequenced properly without knowing what they mean. Shy students (who often surpass their classmates in memory work) become involved in oral interaction; fluency is developed along with <u>esprit de corps</u>.

Of course there are matters of logistics to be faced, like what to do with the other pupils while the strip-sentence holders are sorting themselves out. In some classes this may be solved by having two pupils responsible for a single sentence, each coaching the other and serving as memory prop. In some classes, two or more familiar stories may be involved simultaneously, each story having been printed on strips of a different color. Then the pupils is instructed to remember the color of his sentence along with the sentence itself, and to seek out classmates whose strips have matched his.

For language programs where an activity like the strip story might seem a bit too active, there are more sedentary exercises making use of traditional tales. One is dictation, long a standard feature of every language lesson, then outmoded for a decade or two, now hailed once more as valuable when properly used. Students who have lived with a story for several days, have seen it and heard it and talked about it, benefit from writing selected portions of it, dictated by the teacher or by a pupil.

Another simple writing exercise calls for copying from the chalkboard an unpunctuated version of the story, the punctuation to be restored by the pupil as he writes. A tale that has become familiar through several prior readings can serve admirably for this purpose.

Or the writing exercise may take the form of controlled composition. The pupil is directed to copy the story, with a single prescribed change -- from singular to plural, for instance. Thus our illustrative tale would acquire two protagonists in place of one:

> The Foxes and the Grapes
>
> While walking through a forest one day, two hungry foxes saw some grapes . . . . "How delicious those grapes look!" the foxes said to themselves. "How we wish we could eat some of them!" they thought. . . .

In addition, there are exercises in sentence combining, which lead students to try out possible combinations of "basic" sentences like the following:

> A hungry fox saw some grapes.
> He was walking through a forest one day.

With the teacher's help, the students consider various ways of showing how those two events are related:

A hungry fox saw some grapes while he was walking through a forest one day.

or

While he was walking through a forest one day, a hungry fox saw some grapes.

or (in the words of the story)

While walking through the woods one day, a hungry fox . . . .

There can be no better way to demonstrate the availability of syntactic options -- different ways of expressing the same idea -- than through the rephrasing of content which is completely familiar to the class. Some of the best sentences for illustrating grammatical points come out of stories that the students have come to know well. A story read weeks ago can be "mined" again and again for reinforcing the work of the grammar textbook. In a lesson on reported speech, for example, the pupils may look again at this sentence from The Fox and the Grapes:

He told himself, "I didn't really want them anyway."

Such a sentence serves as well as any textbook example -- far better, in fact -- to show what happens in reported or indirect speech, as the students convert it into its indirect form: He told himself that he hadn't really wanted them anyway. And there is no better time to show the possibility of the deletion of that.

It may be argued that indirect speech is too "advanced" a construction to be of any practical concern to teachers of younger pupils. In most programs, the complexities of reported speech are deferred as long as possible. Yet if a syllabus were geared to frequencies of usage among speakers and writers of English, indirect speech would be introduced earlier than some of the patterns now taught at the elementary and intermediate levels. But that is a topic for another paper. Suffice it to say now that a start might be made on introducing pupils to indirect speech during the recycling of a traditional tale.

At any rate, there can be no doubt that pupils need to practice direct question patterns at almost every level of instruction.

In most language classes, teachers do all the asking; students merely reply. This despite Jespersen's admonition in How to Teach a Foreign Language (now almost three-fourths of a century old) to "allow the pupils themselves to ask each other questions". (The emphasis is his.)

A familiar story can supply context for question-asking by pupils. Members of the class first ask each other questions that call for information retrieval (e.g., "Did the fox see apples, bananas or grapes?"). Then they ask inferential questions (e.g., "Do you think the fox really wanted the grapes?"). The next step may be for the students to ask questions that call for imaginative answers, answers which supply details not given in the story. In a recycling of The Fox and the Grapes, such questions might be "What colour was the fox?" "What did he do after he left the grapes?" The answers, of course, require inventive imagination, not mere recall.

Gary Oddous, who advocated this kind of questioning in the TESL Reporter (Summer 1976) claims that it "facilitates a conversation between fellow students. They become the instigators of conversation, not the teacher. . . ." Since there is no one "correct" answer, the student who replies has a unique chance to offer information that no one else knows.

In the article cited, Oddous indicates that the questions will have been prepared in advance by members of the class. It is quite likely, I suppose, that a little pump-priming would be needed. To show the possibilities of questions for eliciting imagined details, the teacher might well plant a few questions (each written on a slip) among the students, to be read aloud. The aim, of course, is to set the stage for the composing of such questions by the students themselves.

The asking and answering of imaginative questions has a special value. It encourages pupils to use their minds, a habit indispensable to skill in reading; for, as someone has said: "Only by thinking do we make what we read our own."

Yes. But the best thinking occurs when the passage read has become familiar enough to be comprehended throughly. It is asking a great deal to expect that a pupil will put efficient thought into a passage he has barely begun to understand. That is one of many reasons for suggesting that a story ought to be used repeatedly, in a variety of ways. Not all stories wear well enough to stand up under the repeated recycling that I have been stressing here. Fortunately, though, there are stories durable enough to be heard and told again and again -- the oft-repeated, old traditional tales.

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